



National Park Service  
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Lava Beds National  
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## Lava Beds National Monument News Release

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### Cave Researchers Survey A Tiny New World


From the looks of it, someone should warn you about the rare “pseudoscorpion” you could encounter in a lava tube cave at Lava Beds National Monument. With sharp claws, spinney legs, and a ferocious appetite, it’s a good thing it’s smaller than a flea, and almost invisible to the untrained eye. But to scientists Dr. Steven J. Taylor from the Center for Biodiversity in Illinois and Dr. Jean K. Krejca from the University of Texas, surveying for the tiny creatures that live deep within caves is just in a day’s work.

Over the last few months, these scientists have been exploring deep within the caves of the monument. Along with park resource management staff, they are seeking out the unique creatures that have adapted to survival in the darkest, most remote corners of this underground world. They are part of a fragile ecosystem that exists very few places on earth. There is no light, the temperature is chilly year- round, and food is scarce.

Despite these challenges, an incredible variety of tiny macro- invertebrate creatures (animals without backbones big enough to see without a microscope) are being discovered. Crawling slowly over the cave floor and meticulously inspecting cave walls and ceilings, park staff and the visiting scientists are creating a list of all the cave organisms they encounter. To lure more reclusive specimens out of their hiding places, summer intern Sean Dunn explained “We used the best method known – a tiny pill bottle baited with a dab of Limburger cheese.”

Some were so exotic that the captured specimens will be sent to experts for identification. Among them were spiders with legs as fine as hairs, white armored crustaceans (related to pill bugs), centipedes, millipedes, and springtails with delicate double- tails almost twice as long as their bodies. As more is learned about these unique creatures, including organisms not previously recorded in the park, it becomes clear that the caves at the Lava Beds contain a diverse array of macro- invertebrates.

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Because they are so rare and delicate, it is also hoped that this and further research will help identify what conditions must exist in a cave to shelter these unusual organisms and how those conditions are changed by both manmade and natural influences. In turn, this new understanding of the diversity of life sheltered even in the most remote recesses of these caves will help park managers better protect and preserve them. Park managers hope that visitors, flashlights and magnifying glasses in hand, will be able to find these fascinating creatures for many years to come.

Images available at: <http://www.nps.gov/labe/press/photos/macro/>

Lava Beds National Monument's mission is to preserve and protect the significant natural and cultural resources associated with Lava Beds and provide for the public understanding, education and enjoyment of these resources, including wilderness resources and research. For more information, please contact the monument by phone, on the Web at [www.nps.gov/labe](http://www.nps.gov/labe), or visit them at their beautiful new Visitor Center.

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